

# Conversations

*A Chronicle of Social Currents*

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Photo: Rajendra Shaw

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**Oh! What Joy!**  
**Joy in Giving —a perspective**

## From the Editor

Dear Friends,

“What I spent I lost; what I possessed is left to others; what I gave away remains with me,” is a quote that has inspired me to endlessly give all that I can—money, knowledge, time, love, etc. The *Joy of Giving* week has accentuated this belief of mine to the whole of India and I am proud

to join the thousands of people who are struck by the ‘giving’ virus.

The ‘Battle of the Buffet’ has been a platform for many Chennaites to contribute to a cause in a focused way. Kudos to the individual donors and Corporates who have given money to the 55 NGOs of Chennai and supported them!

I sincerely hope that this fever of giving never dies down and will continue to plague every individual. The world would definitely be a better place to live in!

Please join us on the 9th of October at Chennai Trade Centre for the gala dinner!

**P. N. Devarajan**

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# Safety on the Road



Most of the traffic accidents occur due to rash driving, overtaking, driving on the wrong side, selfishness, and indifference. In India about 1 lakh people die and about 4 lakh get permanently injured every year. In Tamil Nadu alone, the figures are 10,000 and 40,000 persons respectively.

This issue is as important as Polio Eradication. The Polio Eradication programme costs a lot of money to UN, Rotary International, Government of India, State Governments and Rotary clubs. With determination and steadfast resolve, the Rotarians world over have almost eradicated Polio.

Road Safety awareness is another important issue

that needs our utmost attention. Many a family lose their loved ones and bread winners due to road mishaps. It is not fair for all of us as responsible citizens to ignore this issue. The Government spends a lot of money on traffic safety measures, but unfortunately, a majority of people ignore the same with utter indifference making the entire system a mockery.

For the situation to improve, the mind set of the people have to be changed. Let us all try and do our best to correct this situation as much as possible!

—Rtn. Narasimhan Rajagopal

Information provided by the Commissioner of Police, Chennai for the month of September 2011

**Number of road accidents - 813**

**Loss of lives due to accidents - 133**

**Number of cases booked for:**

- Traffic violation - 2,81,641
- Signal violation - 19,453
- Wrong side driving - Nil
- Over speeding - 5,442
- Violation of one way rules - 4,695
- Violation of no free left - Nil

AS RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS OF INDIA  
LET US SOLEMNLY PLEDGE

To join hands with all concerned citizens by  
**ACCEPTING and PRACTICING ROAD MANNERS**  
To comply with **TRAFFIC RULES**

To program ourselves to practice the principles of  
**PATIENCE, RESPONSIBILITY, CONSIDERATION**  
and

To propagate Road Safety Awareness to make our  
City, our State and our Country  
**"A SAFE PLACE TO LIVE"**

ADD SPARKLE TO THE SEASON WITH A  
TOUCH OF THE ORIENT AT **China Town**  
A SIP OF SCINTILLATING SPAIN AT **Zara**  
A TINGE OF EXOTIC THAILAND AT **Benjarong**  
A MESMERISING SENSE OF NORTH INDIA  
AT **COPPER CHIMNEY** A SPLASH OF COASTAL FRESHNESS  
AT **Kokum** A MÉLANGE OF SPICES AT **ENTÉ KERALAM**  
AND VEGETARIAN GOODNESS AT **Cream Centre**



“Charity is not a solution. People need skills to earn their living independently. We realized the need to understand the details of working this out professionally and this is when the SEOP programme at CSIM came handy.”



# The Traditional Art In His Own Way

Art and mythological characters in one frame brings in images of Tanjore paintings in our minds. One of the most elaborate forms of traditional art, Tanjore paintings have always added beauty to the surroundings. The embellishments over the sketches using gold foil, gems, Jaipur stones, and others, gives it a dimensional effect, making this art form very unique.

The fact that Tanjore paintings have survived through generations has always intrigued Dr. M. Muthukrishnan of Ramana Arts and Crafts. Having come from Kamatchipuram village of Theni District in Tamil Nadu to Chennai in 1997, he had made up his mind to pursue art as a career. Interestingly, his interest in art sprang from those laborious diagrams of biology lessons. “The science diagrams captivated me. I began to try pictures from calendars and posters,” said Muthukrishnan who would draw different pictures and gift it to his loved ones.

Past class ten, he tried his hands at making sign boards, posters, number plates, and reflection stickers. With no formal training or professional guidance, he explored every opportunity that came his way. While in Chennai, he met Mr. Indrajith, whom he calls his *guru*, who inspired him to take up work immediately.

Soon, in 2000 he established his own business ‘Ramana Arts and Crafts’ with the blessings of the great divine sage Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharishi, and managed it with the help of his family members. He believed in handling his customers directly and this approach did pay off. Today, his clientele covers people from India, US, UK, Singapore, South Africa, Malaysia, Nigeria, New Zealand, and Japan.

“Sculptures and pictures of deities have a meaning only when devotees can connect with them. One of my customers who bought my

painting of Lord Muruga once said to me, ‘Muruga is laughing in our house everyday’. Another NRI couple who had no children was referred to me by their friend. The couple bought my painting of Lord Krishna, and in a span of two years they were blessed with twin girls. It is this happiness in my customers and the satisfaction that motivates me,” said Muthukrishnan with a twinkle in his eye.

There have been views that Tanjore painting is more of reproducing the older paintings. He chose to silence these criticisms by attempting new things. The best of these novel attempts is the creation of the portrait of ‘Aandal Thiruppavai’ (a collection of thirty stanzas written by Aandal in praise of Lord Vishnu) in thirty pictures, comprising of 450 faces in all, measuring between 0.5 and 0.75 centimeters. Muthukrishnan continues to make his characteristic mark in every painting.

There are paintings of Brahma and Saraswathi where Saraswathi is sitting on Brahma’s lap and that of Lakshmi-Easwara-Ganapathy which is a combination of all the three gods in one picture, the first of its kind. While speaking of paintings, an excited Muthukrishnan says, “Trying different ideas that have not been tried enthruses me very much. God created us and I am creating God through my paintings.”

Driven by involvement and a great sense of satisfaction, Muthukrishnan attempted to bring modern art and tradition together. His Tanjore paintings were not restricted to the depiction of gods and goddesses alone. There were yogis too in the gallery—Sri Ramana Maharishi, Sri Swami Narayan, and Sri Ramalinga Swamikal to name a few. The best part of each of the painting is that the eyes in the pictures look at the viewers wherever they are positioned.

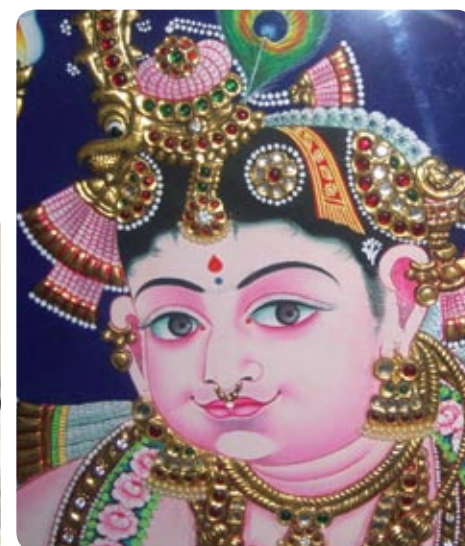
“For me, my favourite hobby earns my bread”, said Muthukrishnan who has won many



**“Trying different ideas that have not been tried enthruses me very much. God created us, and I am creating God through my paintings.”**

accolades. He is the first artist to be awarded a doctorate degree for his brilliant creation of divine paintings, especially Tanjore painting, by the International Tamil University, Maryland, USA. He has also won the Kalai Vendan award for best Thanjavur painting artist by the Tamil Nadu Film Fraternity, and the Seva Ratna award in recognition of his social initiatives.

His ambition is to ‘Create a Creative Community’ and his vision is—to initiate, to innovate, and to integrate the people, especially



physically challenged by forming University of Arts. As a first step in this direction, he has started the ‘Jayam Charitable Trust’ in 2009 to create a source of income for the physically challenged. With the help of his wife, they have evolved a Nutrition and Art therapy programme that creates awareness on nutritional intake along with training in making Tanjore paintings.

“Charity is not a solution. People need skills to earn their living independently. We realized the need to understand the details of working this out professionally and this is when the SEOP programme at CSIM came handy. Instead of just dreaming, we could speak it out, expand our contacts and meet the right people. CSIM has helped us to identify the right contacts and develop our public relations. We also learnt about funds and proposals and recommended our friends to take up these courses. For artists like me with big dreams of social engineering, CSIM provides the right package of knowledge and skills,” stated Muthukrishnan.

Muthukrishnan is an artist on the one hand strictly adhering to ‘*Samudrika Lakshanam*’ and referring to the ancient manuscripts to create portraits, and on the other a social engineer who believes that education must help the learner to open the tap, rather than just filling the bucket.

Let’s wish him success in establishing his dream university!

—Shanmuga Priya R



# Mailing Marvels

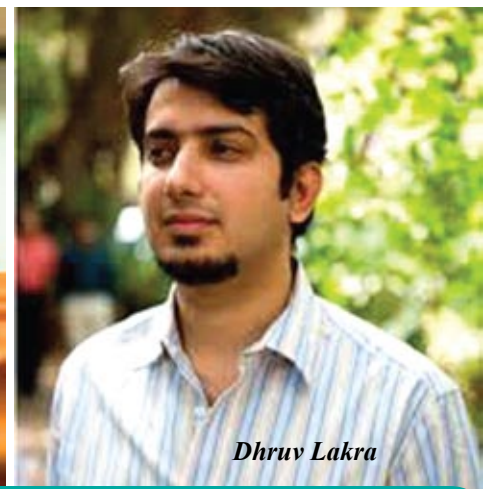
A room full of working people clad in orange T-shirts is what you find on entering the Mirakle Courier office in Mumbai. Letters are sorted; put into bags; young boys and girls are smiling and moving around with great enthusiasm within the office. But, what is most weird and wonderful in the scene is the silence in which all this work is being carried out. Bewildering at first, it takes a while for a person to know that these youngsters are all hearing impaired. The happy silence that prevails in the office is a treat to one's eyes and ears.

Mirakle Courier, the brainchild of Dhruv Lakra, is a business proposition with a difference. "We are not a charity, but a social business where the social element is embedded in the commercial operations," says Dhruv. An accident amongst his family member exposed Dhruv to various problems that the disabled face including unemployment. On analyzing the intensity of the problem, he found the statistics hard to digest. There are around 22 million disabled people in India out of which only around 30 % are employed. Further research done by Dhruv revealed that hearing impaired was the most ignored of all disabilities and the most under-funded as well.

These numbers stirred the entrepreneurial spirit in him. He enrolled in the Post Graduate Programme in Social Enterprise Management offered by CSIM at the SIES college of Management at Nerul in Mumbai. Having been exposed to the concept of social entrepreneurship, Dhruv Lakra left his job as an investment banker in Mumbai and decided to specialize more in this field and understand what was happening around the world. Gayatri Vivek, coordinator of CSIM Mumbai, inspired him to enroll for an MBA in social entrepreneurship at Oxford as a Scholl scholar. On his return, he launched Mirakle courier, a pioneering initiative that employs only the hearing impaired for both administrative work as well as to deliver the mails. His current workforce consists of 20 women who manage the office administration and 44 men who work as courier boys.

"I entered the courier business as it is manpower and volume driven. Furthermore, it can provide employment to the maximum number of deaf," he explains. He was prepared to take all the risks and wanted to make a difference in the courier service delivery mechanism. With 300 pounds that he had saved from his Oxford scholarship and with a lot of hope and enthusiasm, Dhruv Lakra started Mirakle courier.

He further wanted to introduce the concept of supplier diversity amongst the Corporate Sector in India. In the West,



Dhruv Lakra

large corporations provide opportunities to small vendors working with the marginalized sections of society like the disabled, minority, or women owned ventures. They would earmark a certain percentage of their purchases—either goods or services—to such social enterprises. For Instance, AT & T, a leader in telecommunication services procures 15 per cent of their products from Minority Business Enterprises, 5 per cent from Women Business Enterprises, and 1.5 per cent from Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises.

Dhruv now had a two fold mission to accomplish at Mirakle Courier—providing employment for the deaf and sensitizing corporate sector to supplier diversity. He was overwhelmed with the support he received from the corporates whom he contacted initially. The first support he got was from Thermax India, which allowed Mirakle courier to function out of their office space in Colaba for a while. Today, the Aditya Birla Group has provided Mirakle 250 square feet of office space at Churchgate free of cost. His client list includes Vodafone, the Aditya Birla Group, Victory Art Foundation, JSW Group, Indian Hotels Company, Godrej & Boyce, to name a few. They now have another branch office in Andheri. "Our corporate clients have shown trust in our business and cause by availing our services. The growing corporate list shows that our team members are doing their jobs well," says Dhruv.

Everything from pick-up to delivery is carefully planned at Mirakle through sign language. Their field agents receive instructions via sms of a client's address and a time for when documents need to be picked up. Upon arriving at the client's office the shipments are counted and a count confirmation sms is sent back to the branch supervisor.

Once the packages arrive at the branch they are sorted, processed, and prepared for delivery. The women staff



***"Our corporate clients have shown trust in our business and cause by availing our services. The growing corporate list shows that our team members are doing their jobs well."***

sorts out the shipments based on pin codes. Further, sorting is carried out by each field agent who is responsible for a designated area of delivery whose narrow lanes and unmarked buildings he has mastered. Once sorted each document is given a tracking code and entered into the system. "This allows us to track and maintain transparency as to who is responsible for which shipment," says Dhruv.

Proof of Delivery (POD) or a digital delivery status report is then returned to the clients the day after delivery. For faulty or changed addresses, Mirakle

employs one phone operator who will call the client or the consignee to confirm the new address who then explains the situation to the staff in sign language.

Due to the aural nature of Indian traffic, Mirakle's courier boys or field agents travel only via public transport. Relying on feet, bus, and rail has the added environmental benefit of keeping Mirakle on a low carbon footprint.

Communication between Mirakle field agents and branch staff during the day is done via sms. "Text messaging has been a wonderful technological advancement for the hearing impaired, allowing them the unprecedented ability to communicate over long distances. This also allows the management team members or the branch to broadcast information to all agents whether they are at home or on the field. This mode of communication has been very effective and essential to our productivity. We have maintained a zero defect record. No packet has been delivered to the wrong address so far," concludes Dhruv.

Dhruv plans to replicate this model in other metros and prove to the world that the disabled no longer need sympathy but only opportunities.

—Latha Suresh



# Shaping Social Entrepreneurs

Until a few years ago what was your image of the “average” social worker? Positive or negative? Did the person inspire confidence or trust or did you get the feeling that he or she was in the NGO sector for purely the wrong reasons, not to serve the community, but more with an eye on the funds (phoren) perhaps, or looking to use the route as a short cut to media coverage or publicity or to further his/her own personal agenda. Sounds like an exaggeration? The truth is while there existed notable exceptions of people who did outstanding work, the average social worker evoked pretty much the above response.

It was precisely with the motive to equip the prospective social entrepreneur with the necessary wherewithal and skill sets to run his/her NGO efficiently, to shore up his image by enabling him establish his credibility through sustained development, and most importantly to manage the voluntary organisation profitably without having to go around with a begging bowl that the Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) was founded by corporate honcho Mr. P.N Devarajan, former Group Vice President, Reliance. In simple terms, CSIM is a business school for social entrepreneurs.

What prompted Devarajan to launch CSIM was the realization that while the sector was peopled by NGO founders who had dedication and fire in their bellies, conventional social work knowledge alone was far from enough. Lack of critical skills retarded their progress and stretched their capacity in the early stages. What was clearly missing were/was management skills and leadership orientation, which probably resulted in the temptation to go in for shortcuts. A customized training programme for social entrepreneurs was just what was necessary to put them through their paces, besides mentors to do some hand holding in the initial stages.

Says Mr. Devarajan, “As we face the twenty first century it is increasingly clear that non-profit managers and leaders face many challenges—growth, new social problems, government funding cutbacks, and public scrutiny. Non-profit organizations must become clearer about their mission; better at managing people and money; and more effective in marketing and fundraising. These challenges call for modern skills, adoption of tried and tested business strategies used by leading businesses and non-profit



enterprises, continuous evaluation of client outcomes, and performance indicators amongst other things.”

Starting off with 8 students in the year 1999, in the face of severe skepticism, CSIM has so far trained 252 Prospective Social Entrepreneurs (PSE) through its one-year PG Diploma in Social Initiative and Management, and four-month Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Program. Of these, 117 were heading their own NGOs at the time of enrolling in the course.

CSIM started in Chennai, but has today spread to Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Bangalore. Mr. Devarajan’s vision is to have about 100 centers across the country that will become a one-stop shop for social entrepreneurs.

The curriculum for the one-year full time programme and short-term programme was evolved after a great deal of deliberation with social change agents, academicians, industrialists, and volunteers. A combination of classroom learning and practice school training (field visits, block placement) exposing students to existing NGOs, interaction with development personnel was formulated. A lot of ground is covered in the courses that CSIM offers. From managing social change to NGO business planning, to Financial management, People management, Communication, Fund raising, Public relations, Legal aspects, Documentation and Networking, Human rights, Gender development, Human behaviour, Values, Ethics, Counseling,

***“Non-profit organizations must become clearer about their mission; better at managing people and money; and more effective in marketing and fundraising.”***

Project monitoring and exposure to various issues in the development sector—nothing is left to guesswork.

At the end of their graduation PSEs learn to create an operating model that will adapt and sustain in any situation, understand the need to be transparent, and apply successful business practices while retaining the service mission, appreciate the advantages of working synergistically with other NGOs, and most important of all figure how to get better bang for their buck.

The changing profile of the PSE graduates is also gratifying. While 42 students have gone on to start their own NGOs—thirty in number, others have returned to their jobs in the social sector armed with practical knowledge that enables them to function more effectively.

Incidentally CSIM has looked at the exercise with service mindedness. For

many students who cannot afford it, the fee is completely waived or highly subsidized. At this juncture it is relevant to record that CSIM is the project of a registered public charitable trust called Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhini. The Trust gives away the prestigious Sadguru Gnanananda awards to renowned women social entrepreneurs and offers fellowship to social workers. Yet another idea initiated by this trust is the DOS scheme i.e. dal, oil, and sugar distribution scheme to benefit needy NGOs.

In order to raise social consciousness, trigger action, catalyze social change, and make the world a more equitable place, CSIM has tried to engage a cross section of society. It offers modules on social entrepreneurship to college students and NSS students of IIT Madras, besides organizing Social Action Group lectures and conducting capacity building workshops for NGOs. Foraying into research activities CSIM has been recently commissioned by the US Embassy New Delhi to undertake a study on the feasibility of establishing a Women’s fund in Chennai.

So what has CSIM’s impact been like on Prospective Social Entrepreneurs and what kind of a difference has it made to their thought process? Perhaps the best testimonials come from the alumni themselves.

Says Kalpana of Ramamoorthy Educational Trust which runs a home for children: “My aim in life has always been to become a social entrepreneur. But, I simply didn’t have the courage. I was also very shy by nature. CSIM gave me the confidence to follow my dreams and communicate my ideas to people. I learnt how to demonstrate my involvement in a practical way.”

Chezian, a visually challenged person who runs Mercy Charitable Trust says: “CSIM was instrumental in the links it provided to several NGOs. I was also exposed to subjects like auditing, accounts, documentation, fund raising, etc. The exposure to other NGOs gave me an idea of how communities were developed and how programmes were organized.”

As the need for credible and effective NGOs that can address the problems of society increases steadily there is no doubt that CSIM will continue to play an even more pivotal role in the years ahead.

—Sudha Umashanker





Oh!

## WHAT JOY!

“While mystics and the scriptures from organized religions propound the virtues of unselfish work, the argument of whether it is possible to actually execute it flawlessly may best be left to everybody’s imagination.”

It is 4:00 A.M. If you are a hosteler, then this is likely the time when you would be returning to your room after the group-studies or the group assignment (remember the kind in which after a long discussion it is generally concluded that you are the best person to ‘summarize’ the entire group’s discussions, meaning that you are loaded with pages and pages of raw data which have to be processed in lightning speed in order to make it to the submission that is due in four hours, while the rest of the group enjoys a celebratory nap until class begins in the next few hours?). Tired, hungry, and somewhat ready to pounce on the next person for all the frustration, you enter your room only to find it locked from the inside. ‘Now, how on earth did that happen?’ you wonder.

Just when you are about to kick at your door hard, something happens. There is a blur of a movement. Somebody opens the door, the lights go on, and a bunch of your best friends shout ‘SURPRISE!’ The room is filled with the magical aroma of a candle burning on a tray full of cookies! And then, there is laughter and loud banter that echoes all the way down the empty floor. ‘Believe me, on that day they (my friends) not only fixed my growling tummy for that instant, but truly made me feel on top of the world. The best part is that it was not even my birthday!’ says a laughing Shruthi, recounting nostalgically the instances of selfless giving by her friends.

Though it lasted hardly for ten minutes, this small gesture of her friends helped to ease out her anxiety and went a long way in her eventually facing the monster of her assignment, which, for our information, did get done in time. Even today, whenever Shruthi feels overburdened, she recollects that particular instance as it lights up her mood instantly, making her feel energetic and positive all over again. She tries to

reciprocate by watching out for a chance to throw in a little surprise every now and then just to bring a smile on someone’s face.

The Joy of Giving Week is here, running its third successful annual course between the 2nd and 8th of October 2011. Individuals, corporate houses, and NGOs in a rare expression of oneness are pooling together crores of rupees as donation, contributing their time to millions of volunteer-hours, and collecting articles in kind that are being distributed to thousands of people across the country. Thousands of children are getting the gift of education, hundreds of people with disabilities are getting facilities which are due to them, scores of youth are getting a fair chance at making a career of their choice, women are being empowered, artisans are being accorded some long overdue value for their talent, and the elderly are getting better care through this nation-wide drive.

This initiative, started by Give India Foundation along with other organizations such as CRY and Help Age India in 2009, has seen multi-fold

“It would not necessarily be the same person or group whom you would remember as being a recipient of your kindness.”

increase in participation in a very short time. It may be noted that as per the original design of the initiative, the ownership of the activities leading up to this week is being taken up by more and more participants, making it a national movement of sorts. During this time of the year, Conversations team got acquainted with people’s perceptions of giving and how it impacts the life of the giver and the receiver.

“Yes, every one of us who is privileged enough to have a roof over our head, two square meals a day, and the wherewithal to make a dignified living must give back to the society. While it may be moving to see a hungry woman begging for food for her toddler down the main roads; homeless families that wander from one platform to another to escape the wrath of the police; listening to the tragic riches-to-rags stories of an auto-rickshaw driver; survivors of disasters; and so on, we must question our own temptation to immediately offer them money or even articles in kind, for when done in isolation, more often than we would care to admit, these are way too inadequate. They inverse the process of empowerment thereby putting the giver on a pedestal and thrusting a sense of indebtedness upon the receiver which only lowers their self-esteem, and worse it even leads to their becoming lazier by the day” says Ramani, an academican. He merely reflects a point of view shared by many.

Talking to Sue, a lifestyle expert, one’s inner teen finds a kindred spirit when she says, “I suppose it is unfair to talk about the joy of giving when all I can really think of in my head are images of those things that I desire to make mine. Possession is as much of a potent language of emotion as anything else it may signify. It is natural for anybody to want to be acknowledged for a good deed, to be

remembered for the kind of person that they are, and to have influenced somebody’s life positively. If we were to break down an act of kindness to the minutest level, we can still find an element, however small or big, of wanting something for oneself in it. I believe that there is nothing wrong in that.”

So, is there no such thing as ‘selflessness’? While mystics and the scriptures from organized religions propound the virtues of unselfish work, the argument of whether it is possible to actually execute it flawlessly may best be left to everybody’s imagination. What we need to understand is that giving is an act involving two parties. Often in giving, we tend to remember only the role of the giver and do not give much of a thought to that of a receiver.

Such diverse responses as above show us just what a huge responsibility it is to give. Know that even as we talk, someone somewhere is living a better life because of an influence, a word, an article, a gift, or those five minutes of silence that you shared with them, a very long time ago. It would not necessarily be the same person or group whom you would remember as being a recipient of your kindness. That one can seldom know what act of theirs has been truly beneficial, to which person, as well as how one obscure act of kindness can boomerang and come right back to you. This is the real beauty in giving!

Ultimately, it matters not whether you gave them a dime or a dozen. After all, as someone so aptly put it, giving is not about how much you give; it is about how you give. This season, we wish all our readers a Happy Giving!

—Archanaa R.

(All names have been changed at the request of the people to maintain anonymity)



# Cooking for a Cause



Mahalakshmi

On the occasion of Joy of Giving-2011, Oriental Cuisines and CSIM organised a series of food related events called—COOKING FOR A CAUSE.

The first event, Community Kitchen was conducted on 25th September 2011 at Labour colony, Ekaduthangal, Chennai.

20 Self-help group members of WEED Trust pooled in resources and cooked a sumptuous lunch at Labour colony for 20 HIV infected and destitute women who reside at the Zonta Resource centre (ZRC).

ZRC started in 1992, and is the only short stay home cum resource centre in South Asia for

women living with HIV/Aids. This residential home is located at Madambakkam near Tambaram. ([www.zontaresourcecentre.org](http://www.zontaresourcecentre.org))

The 20 ZRC women arrived at the venue around 11:30 A.M and were warmly greeted by the SHG women. They played a few games, sang songs and enjoyed their time here. An elaborate south Indian lunch comprising of sweet *pongal*, *payasam*, *vadai*, rice, *sambar*, *rasam*, three vegetable dishes, pickle, curd, and *appalam* was served. The ZRC women relished the delicious lunch and thanked the SHG women for having invited them.

After lunch, the SHG women

distributed sarees for the 20 ZRC women. They also collected for the ZRC 65 kgs of ration (13 kgs of Toor dal, 20 kgs of rice, 10 kgs of boiled rice, 12 kgs of oil, 10 kgs of sugar); provision items like mustard, jeera, urad dal, and chilli worth Rs. 1500; and 25 biscuit packets. All these items were handed over by the SHG women to the ZRC staff.

"We are happy to see the joy in the faces of ZRC women. We would like to do this as an annual event and vow to be part of the 'Joy of Giving' celebrations every year," said Mahalakshmi, Founder, WEED Trust.

—Latha Suresh





# Beyond Care

We networked with Child Trust Hospital and 51 other hospitals in Chennai, and formed nodal clinics with the support of 170 pediatricians.

**E**kam Foundation, the brainchild of Dr. Sai Lakshmi, works towards the health care of underprivileged children in the state of Tamil Nadu. Ekam was formally inaugurated on 1st July, 2007 as a Community Pediatric Project of Confederation of Indian Organisations for service and Advocacy (CIOA), and was spun off as an independent organization in August 2009.

*Excerpts from an interview with Dr. Sai Lakshmi, Founder, Ekam Foundation.*

## Introduction

I am a pediatrician and graduated from a Government hospital. In private hospitals you would find one doctor managing one or two sick children, whereas in a Government hospital, when we were on duty, we used to manage 100 babies at a time.

Basically, four things are important—drugs, equipment, lab support, and manpower. There was a huge discrepancy in demand and supply at Government hospitals and children used to die due to lack of proper medical facilities. All the time I used to feel that there should be a system that could fill in the gap, and wondered why money should play a role in health care.

## Conception

Every child has a right to live. I wanted a system to complement this and hence launched Ekam Foundation with a vision—Right to Health for Every Child. I believe that no child should be refused health care for financial reasons. No father should feel guilty that he cannot treat his child neither should a doctor refuse to treat a child for this reason.

## The First Step

In 2006, when I was working at Mehta Nursing Home in Chennai as a Neonatologist, I started the Mehta Community Pediatric Health Project. We networked with around 50 to 60 pediatricians (senior, junior, and colleagues) in Chennai. We matched them to orphanages which were near to their homes and requested them to take ownership and provide help to the children in their vicinity. Initially, everyone was enthusiastic; but repeated visits became difficult for the doctors due to their busy schedule. The pediatricians therefore offered to treat the children in their clinic which was fair enough. So, we started a nodal clinic model where children were provided treatment free of cost. Later on, we thought that it would be better to tie up with hospitals instead of networking with pediatricians. This idea was well received and we networked with Child Trust Hospital and 51 other hospitals in Chennai, and formed nodal clinics with the support of 170 pediatricians.

Simultaneously, we conducted training programmes for caretakers in orphanages as we felt that unless they were trained in neonatal and pediatric care, they would not be able to take proper care of the children. A regular curriculum for a period of 12 weeks was derived and training for orphanage caretakers, self-help group women, and *angamwadi* workers were provided free of cost.

## The Leap

I owe a lot to Mafoi Foundation who helped me launch Ekam in 2009. They were also instrumental in establishing networks for Ekam within the NGO sector.

We worked with corporation schools and ICDS centers and learnt that most of the children from orphanages studied here. We started a school health programme and made it into a public-private partnership model so that we could network with the government health programs. While screening the *angamwadi* children, we noted that the government doctors who were supposed to go to schools and do the screening were not doing so because they did not have a vehicle, or diesel made available. They had written this excuse in their books at least 20 times in a month. We requested Praveen Travels to donate two vehicles, and offered them to the government doctors.

We provided Anemia Profile Access treatment to children whereby each child was given iron tablets once a week for three weeks by the doctors. In two years of time we reached out to nearly 80,000 children to whom 5 lakh iron tablets were provided. The school teachers have given us a positive feedback stating that the students do not complain of body pain anymore; their mental alertness is good, and the absenteeism rate has reduced.

During the third year, we started working with the Government hospitals. We tied up with the drug suppliers who could provide medicines on credit and at a subsidized cost. We also networked with labs that offered us a 40 per cent subsidy and with a vendor who rented lifesaving equipment like ventilator, etc. Focus Infotech, a corporate house, supported the salary of four staff at the Cancer Ward in the Government hospital for Children in Chennai, and today this ward provides care equal to a private hospital.

## Expansion

We slowly extended our service to Chengelpet and Madurai and now operate through 41 nodal centers spread across Tamil Nadu. The government has assigned us with the responsibility to recruit nurses in the new born care unit across Tamil Nadu as there was an increase in infant mortality. It was a great opportunity for us as the



and purchase the drugs required for their unit. The coordinators visit the hospital once a week, record the needs, prepare a monthly report, and then submit it to the District Health Society which is a government body convened by the District Collector.

## Future plans

Our ultimate vision is to bring about a community run model and make them independent of Ekam after three years. We plan to approach the local companies to adopt the units in their district. At the moment Ekam has an outstanding due of 50 lakh rupees to the drug suppliers. A beautiful bond has been created with our drug suppliers that they wait for us to repay the amount.

We believe in abundance. This whole project is working only out of pure love and abundance, but it is not sustainable at the moment. Life through unconditional love is a wondrous adventure that excites the very core of our being and lights our path with delight, and this is what we all experience in Ekam. We appeal to the corporate houses to adopt at least one unit that costs Rs. 50,000 a month. This could save the lives of many children. The start of something new brings the hope of something great. Anything is Possible!

—Marie Banu



# Solitude



An inspiring conversation with Ramana Maharishi and his disciple on solitude.

**Disciple:** Is solitude necessary for a Jnani?

**Maharishi:** Solitude is in the mind of man. One might be in the thick of the

world and maintain serenity of mind; such is solitude. Another may stay in a forest, but still be unable to control his mind. He cannot be said to be in solitude. Solitude is a function of the mind. A man attached to desire cannot get solitude wherever he may be; a detached man is always in solitude.

**D.:** So then, one might be engaged in work and be free from desire and keep up solitude. Is it so?

**M.:** Yes. Work performed with attachment is a shackle, whereas work performed with detachment does not affect the doer. He is, even while working, in solitude.

**D.:** They say that there are many saints in Tibet who remain in solitude and are still very helpful to the world. How can it be?

**M.:** It can be so. Realisation of the Self is the greatest help that can be rendered to humanity. Therefore, the saints are said to be helpful, though they remain in forests. But it should not be forgotten that solitude is not in forests only. It can be had even in

towns, in the thick of worldly occupations.

**D.:** It is not necessary that the saints should mix with people and be helpful to them?

**M.:** The Self alone is the Reality; the world and the rest of it are not. The realised being does not see the world as different from himself.

**D.:** Thus then, the saint's realisation leads to the uplift of humanity without the latter being aware of it. Is it so?

**M.:** Yes. The help is imperceptible but is still there. A saint helps the whole of humanity, unknown to the latter.

**D.:** Would it not be better if he mixed with others?

**M.:** There are no others to mix with. The Self is the one and only Reality.

**D.:** If there be a hundred Self-realised men will it not be to the greater benefit of the world?

**M.:** When you say 'Self' you refer to the

unlimited, but when you add 'men' to it, you limit the meaning. There is only one Infinite Self.

**D.:** Yes, yes, I see! Sri Krishna has said in the Gita that work must be performed without attachment and such work is better than idleness. Is it Karma Yoga?

**M.:** What is said is given out to suit the temperament of the hearers.

**D.:** In Europe it is not understood by the people that a man in solitude can be helpful. They imagine that men working in the world can alone be useful. When will this confusion cease? Will the European mind continue wading in the morass or will it realise the truth?

**M.:** Never mind Europe or America. Where are they except in your mind? Realise your Self and then all is realised. If you dream and see several men, and then wake up and recall your dream, do you try to ascertain if the persons of your dream creation are also awake?

—Excerpted from Sri Ramana Maharishi teachings

## Feedback process – the essential nutrient for growing

Growing requires effective feedback. Learning to give as well as receive feedback is imperative for both individual growth as well as team growth. The importance of this emerges from both the receiving point of view for the social entrepreneurs and them giving the feedback to their team members, all from a growing perspective. That is why feedback becomes a double edged sword—it can either slice open for further development or slice the spirit of enthusiasm to die.

In our initial writings in this series we have outlined the profile of the social entrepreneur. The highlight was their passion; blind faith in their vision; willingness to risk; ability to walk alone if need be; high standards and expectations; perseverance; and sometimes ego which comes with the passion. These make both receiving and giving feedback a tough process. The person who is giving feedback needs to understand the profile of the social entrepreneur and when the social entrepreneurs critically analyze others they have to realize their standards versus others who work in their organizations.

Everything becomes dependent on not so much in the content of the feedback, but in the way it is being delivered. While the intention of the feedback may be good, if the delivery is not appropriate, then rejection of the feedback is an obvious outcome.

A man began to give large doses of cod-liver oil to his Doberman because he had been told that the stuff was good for dogs. Each day he would hold the head of the protesting dog between his knees, force its jaws open, and pour the oil down its throat. One day the dog broke away and spilt



the oil on the floor. Then to the man's great surprise, it not only lapped up the oil that spilt on the floor, but came back to lick the spoon.

That is when the man discovered that the dog had been fighting was not for the oil, but the manner in which it was being given. (Sampath. J.M. story 80 Discovery—3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998)

While giving feedback, many times sensitivity is missed. Sensitivity could imply being aware of the team members' receiving capacity, their feelings and emotions, and giving time to prepare the person by sharing the intent of the feedback. The feedback needs to be on the actions of the person than the personality of the person. A responsible feedback will include providing clarity on the modifications expected. Labeling and judgements are the dangers where the feedback gets loaded with emotional reactions. For the social entrepreneur whose expectation from self is high and who is willing to scale the mountain to

move things the way they desire, feedbacks can come as a ton of bricks onto the team members. They need to truly tone down and communicate the intentions to others clearly. It is a big challenge for the social entrepreneur to keep moving spaces in the scale of performance and yet nurture others to achieve their potential. Sensitivity calls for:

- a deep introspection into self before giving the feedback
- clarity on the purpose the feedback is expected to achieve
- an open mindedness to explore and discuss while giving feedback
- a high sense of integrity and ability to practice what one expects from other team members
- being non judgmental and nurturing in sharing the viewpoints

The team members on the other hand while receiving feedback from a social entrepreneur conveniently put themselves in different positions based on stakes and roles and therefore miss the nutrients that can make them grow. The social entrepreneur's intensity may many a time scare the recipient of the feedback. But, the content may have the required capacity to open up the potential that the team member would not have even envisaged while working on a social project.

The basic question while receiving feedback is—are we going to be caught with the way it is given or the content of the feedback? If the nutrient for growth is in the content, what stops many of us to focus on the way in which the feedback comes?

- Our own ego stops us from receiving the feedback when it

A Series on Growing-Reflections for Deep Change

- punches the core enthusiasm.
- Our hierarchical way of functioning stops us by closing certain channels
- The "I know" which closes the mind and makes one defensive makes receiving feedback a difficult process
- Questioning the competence, clarity, role, etc., of the person who is giving the feedback can totally bias the receptivity

While every feedback has the essential nutrient to nurture growth, the onus of receiving as well as giving appropriately is on the individual. While the social entrepreneur has the gift of passion, the intensity should be fine tuned to allow growth to happen if team has to be nurtured.

### Points for Reflection:

- What am I truly interested in while giving feedback – 'giving my way' or 'giving'?
- What are the ways I use to understand the team members and their capacity to receive feedback?
- What measures do I use to check the intent, purpose, and the outcome of my feedback to others?
- When feedback comes from several quarters what is the extent of my open mindedness to receive and reflect on them?
- What makes me adamant to receive the feedback in the way I want than in the way it comes?

—J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath



# Winners

## From the Kitchen

*“Good things do not spread fast while bad things do. Therefore, we are extremely conscious of the quality of products that is served here.”*

The idea of providing employment opportunities to school dropouts between the age of 16 to and 25 belonging to economically backward communities is not new to us. Mr. Mahadevan of Chennai Mission walked an extra mile to initiate steps in this direction by approaching the Chennai Corporation and the Rotary Club of Madras East. And so, the ‘Foundation for Vocational Training’ was formed, leading to the birth of Winners Bakery in 2005, cashing in on the need for good bakers in the country.

The training is an everyday feature, happening throughout the year. The course spans over six months with a monthly stipend of Rs. 2500, and provides free food, bus fare, uniform, and laundry to the trainees. The uniqueness of the programme lies in the fact that the trainees here are trained in bakery, confectionery, and impart skills pertaining to the entire chain of activities in the process.

“Mr. Balasubramanianmm Manager of Winners Bakery quotes Mr. Mahadevan saying, “Bread is no longer a patient’s food.”

“The children who had no purpose or guidance are shown a direction here and they have made the best use of the vocation to make a living and move ahead in life. The trainees are proficient in making bread rolls, croissants, cookies, tarts, doughnuts, muffins, and cakes. The Foundation also offers training in basic computing and spoken English for students from the community,” he adds.

“Life at Winners Bakery has evolved a sense of time discipline in its inmates, along with a food culture. The trainees have grown to make their characteristic mark on each of the products sold here”, explains Balasubramanian, while boasting about a 19-year-old boy from the kitchen who is capable of making delicious fillings.

The Rotary Club of Madras East plays the role of identifying the beneficiaries. The secret behind the success of Winners Bakery is the thrust on quality at reasonable prices. “Good things do not spread fast while bad things do. Therefore, we are extremely conscious of the quality of products that is served here. Interestingly, at affordable prices, the bakery has grown to make a good turn over, the surplus of which are pooled in for other educational and community initiatives,” says Balasubramanian.

The Foundation was approached by the Police Department to set up CCTVs in the slums of Kannagi Nagar in Thuraipakkam



to assist the observation of the individuals and children involved in nefarious activities. Recently, they had provided cots for the Chennai Corporation Medical Mission and also sports equipment for the residents of Kannagi Nagar in Thuraipakkam. In essence, Winners Bakery makes multiple activities possible—all of them converging at the purpose of community development.

On the response of trainees to pursue a career in this vocation, Balasubramanian explained that most of those who joined the courses were willing to pursue a career in baking and confectionery. Some of them have joined Winners Bakery to begin with and the products made by them are being supplied to many star hotels and private concerns.

In collaboration with the Department of Social Defense of Tamil Nadu, Winners Bakery has opened a production cum sale outlet to train the children of the Juvenile Home at Purasawalkam. An outlet of the bakery has also been opened on Santhome High Road at Chennai.

Consistency and credibility of Winners Bakery was duly recognized from all quarters. Mr. R. Nataraj, IPS, former Director General of Police, Puzhal Prison had approached Mr. Mahadevan to train the prisoners in bread making and the bread making unit was set up within the prison campus with the raw materials coming from Winners Bakery.

The bread produced is distributed to a number of orphanages in and around Chennai, including Little Angels, Aruvi, and Arunodayam, on a regular basis. Besides initiating such programmes, the unit also supports the efforts of other organizations such as Sri Annapoorani Women’s Self Help Group that is being supported by the TVS Group. The food products made by the group members are sold at the bakery without additional profit margins. Market access to this group has helped them have a larger reach for their products.

All the aforesaid instances stand proof to assert that Winners Bakery has and will



continue to be in the good books of different sections of the society.

If you wish to know more Winners bakery or would like to recommend a candidate for training, please contact 04424982423.

—Shanmuga Priya R



# Sincerely Zealous

**Amala Akkineni** shares with **Marie Banu** her passion for animals and her guidance to those who seek to volunteer

**A**mala Akkineni was educated in Bharathanatyam at Kalakshetra, Chennai, and is married to Telugu actor Akkineni Nagarjuna.

She is also one of the prominent animal welfare activists of India and is the founder of Blue Cross of Hyderabad, a non-government organization which works towards the welfare of animals and preservation of animal rights. She is a vegan and an environmentalist. She also teaches Yoga for women, and promotes communal harmony.

*In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu, Amala Akkineni shares her passion for animals and her guidance to those who seek to volunteer.*

## What inspired you to launch Blue Cross of Hyderabad?

As a professional aspiration, I had never planned being an actor. But, it was a very good profession as far as financial stability is concerned. Once I achieved this, I wanted to do something that appealed to my heart. I made a clean career break. I got married and moved into my husband's city.

I went back to classical dancing and I started rehearsing with Jyotsana, my friend from Kalashetra, who also lived at Hyderabad. I would go to Secunderabad for rehearsals and enroute found sick and injured animals. I started rescuing them—taking them to the local vets, looking after them at home—and after a month or so my husband came back from work one day and said, “Our house is like a zoo. There are injured animals in every nook and corner including a buffalo with a broken hip in our garage. You really should do this more organized.” It was his idea! Till then, I was just responding to needs. He donated me the first ambulance and that is how Blue Cross started.

**It is learnt that Blue Cross has extended help to over 300,000 sick, injured and abused animals and birds till date. Did you envisage this reach when you launched Blue Cross?**

It is interesting you ask. I had a wonderful experience. Initially when I saw all the suffering I thought, ‘Oh God! How am I going to do all this?’ If you have helped one you would see another



20 waiting for treatment.

One night, Rukmini Devi (*athai* as we would call her) appeared in my dream. I had a lot of love and regard for her and had interacted with her when she was alive. In my dream, she was taking a group of students from my dance class and walking briskly around Kalashetra campus. She had her hands sweeping and showing the entire vast expanse of Kalashetra, the classes, the performances, and the theatre. She had a twinkle in her eye and she told me, “Do you think I thought about all of this when I started Kalashetra? Do what you believe and the universe will help you!”

I woke up that morning feeling absolutely sure that what I was going to begin was something that the universe needed to be done and I was just an instrument. I don't think of this as my work or my doing. There are so many wonderful people and animals whose energies have gotten together. This to me is the expression of best of human qualities—compassion and service, joy and love—has come together and manifested this. I am happy to be part of it!

**Some people are paranoid of stray dogs even though they would have been sterilized and free from disease. What is your advice for them?**

There are all sorts of people. On the one hand, there are people who fear animals because of some traumatic experience that has led them to feel that way. On the other hand we have certain psychotic or so called animal terrorists who are socially misfit and they use animals to cause a different kind of terror in the community. One has to have a fine balance.

As far as I know, every reputed organisation working for animals has a good education programme which reaches out to the community, and exposing people and their children at an early age to understand animals and how to behave with them. Blue Cross education programme has a specifically designed slide show presentation for school children. It addresses exactly that—how children need to behave with animals; why a dog bites and how to avoid getting bitten; how to overcome fear; how they can understand animals better; and what is the body language when a dog is playful, angry, sick, etc.

What we understand, we share with the children, and they love it.

**Your organisation has been promoting the adoption of indigenous mixed breed Indian dogs as part of your mission to bring down the number of homeless animals. Can you share with our readers your experience?**

We want to reduce stray and homeless animals so we sterilize animals and give homeless puppies for adoption. We promote adoption of Indian homeless animals from the hundreds of puppies, kittens, cats, and dogs abandoned on the streets. We believe everyone can help by adopting a homeless one and not just by buying fashionable pedigreed animals.

When an animal becomes part of your family it is like a child. Sadly in India, most of our pedigreed animals are inbred and unscientifically bred. All of them have some kind of genetic flaw. At three or four a Dalmatian can die of kidney failure; at three or four a German Shepherd could get hip dysplasia; and at one or two years of age, a Great Dane could suffer from liver failure. A pet lover who begins to love their animals like members of their family goes through the trauma of disease and then death of a pet.

I had both my young Dalmations die in my arms due to kidney failure. It was deeply disturbing as they were adorable wonderful creatures. Whereas, the Indian dogs, and I have had many of them along with my pedigreed dogs, are so hardy and naturally designed for our climate that besides their annual vaccination and sterilization operations, they never fall sick. I never had an Indian dog have health issues like the pedigreed ones. They are affectionate, loyal, and excellent guard dogs too.

**Which of these roles would you like yourself to be identified with: Dancer; Actor; Animal welfare activist; spouse of a leading Star; all of them?**

I think we all have different roles at different times. I work with about 12 reputed organizations on different issues. It could be animal welfare, environmental protection, widow empowerment, orphan education, or HIV awareness. Each issue is very dear to my heart, but there is something about animals that is

dear to me. . From the age of five I have been rescuing injured birds and animals. That is definitely part of my personality and it will be in any role I play. Whether I am the super star's wife, or a dancer, or an actor—that animal rescuer will always be part of my psyche.

**Your guidance to those who seek to volunteer?**

One must have a very strong ethical code of conduct. Unfortunately, in most welfare movements there is so much of negativity and politics where people are insulting each other to get a better name or position in the name of the cause. One must focus on the work and avoid the negativity. Secondly, you would need a strong commitment. If you say that you feel strongly for children, then make an appointment in your diary and say when you will go out to do it. Stop talking, stop thinking, but go and do it!

The first time you help you will learn. When you attend a course on the issue, or volunteer or intern with an organisation by offering your professional skills you will get a deeper understanding of how you can help. But, make that commitment first!

I would say that three hours of volunteering in a week is enough to start. If you are able to keep that appointment, then at the end of the month you would have not only increased your confidence and understanding, but you would have also connected with a lot of people who are already doing that work, increased your network, and at the end of the year have a very impressive report of what you were able to do.

That is how the 3 lakh animals came about at Blue Cross. You make that commitment, and before you know you would be well on the path of social work.

There is so much to do and so much to learn, so all the best!

## Editorial

**Latha Suresh**  
**Marie Banu**